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ABSTRACT

Education in Illinois will face a number of problems in the 1980s: decline in student enrollment, inflation, and decline in public support of education. It is impossible to estimate how these forces will affect speech communication and theatre programs, but three factors suggest that real opportunities exist for speech and theatre among the aforementioned challenges. First, speaking and listening are being accorded major attention as central to the educational process and as areas in which the skills of all individuals must be fully developed. Second, there is growing general public awareness of the importance of oral communication skills. Third, the speech profession has matured to a point where it is ready to respond to the communication needs of business. But the speech profession must continue to work toward greater quality. In this challenge to excellence four things must be considered: (1) there must be a vision of the future; (2) speech and theatre professionals must work in cooperation with colleagues, particularly those in English; (3) the quality of such programs must be discernible; and (4) speech professionals must cope with the conflict between the desire for high standards and the desire to provide every person with a quality flexible education. (HTH)

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by Kenneth E. Andersen

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WHAT DO THE 1980'S HOLD FOR SPEECH AND THEATRE PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS?

by Kenneth E. Andersen

The practice of speech and theatre is as old as the human race. Indeed, before we developed the sense of being "human" we had speech and theatre. Our field is both very old and very new. Once central to any sense of "education," the study and practice of speech and theatre as part of "formal education" have appeared and disappeared over the centuries. Although some aspects of theatre and of mass communication are accepted as part of education in many countries, classroom instruction under rubrics such as interpersonal communication, speech, public speaking, mass media, debate, interpretation, theatre, is accepted in relatively few countries and widely accepted perhaps only in this country. Even here, each decade in this century has seen substantial changes in the subject matter and instructional methods of our field.

My purpose in this article is not to review where we have been but to examine where we are and what lies ahead. I propose to do this not by an examination of speech, communication, and theatre programs and problems, but by placing our programs in the context of larger issues and trends, both nationally and within our state. While noting several factors, I concentrate on those that may be more useful to the reader in terms of demonstrating the need for and potentialities of our programs at elementary, secondary and college levels. While we face many challenges in this decade, we have an opportunity to ensure our place at the center of the educational process in our schools and colleges, in preparing future educators, and in fulfilling the demonstrated needs of those no longer involved in formal education and unlikely to return to that setting to fulfill their needs.

FACTORS IMPACTING EDUCATION

Education, elementary and secondary and higher, faced a number of problems in the decade of the '70's and the problems of the '80's look even tougher. Illinois bears the brunt of these problems to a degree greater than most states.

One major factor has been the decline in the "age cohort" that began when the "baby boom" turned from a "baby recession" to a "baby depression." The decline in potential or actual students has yet to impact fully on our colleges as it has on elementary and many secondary schools. Population mobility has intensified the impact with schools closing and program retrenchment in some areas while demand increases in other geographical areas.

Rampant inflation in the last several years, particularly in energy costs, has had a major impact. Resources made available have not kept pace. According to a 1983 AAUP study, in the decade from 1971-72 to 1981-82, real faculty salaries in higher education fell an average of 20.5%.[1] The equivalent drop for the population generally was 4.3%. Another study reveals that from 1972-73 to 1982-83, Illinois had the lowest increase of all fifty states in percentage increase in real dollars appropriated to higher education, a minus 14%.[2] Michigan, widely perceived as devastated by the recession, was forty-ninth with a decrease of 11%. Meanwhile, Illinois has the highest enrollment of students in publicly-supported higher education in its history.

Despite the recent tax increases, some temporary, some permanent, which avoided the "doomsday budget" for Illinois (a budget which would have impacted education with particular severity), support for education lags badly. Many school districts are in chronic states of financial stress and will continue to be for the foreseeable future.

The promised ending of the recession will not remove this threat. Illinois is projected to recover more slowly than the national average and may never return to its former economic vigor. Often unnoticed in economic analyses, however, are other demands. Education competes with many other needs for the tax dollar. Garbage must be picked up, streets cleaned, sidewalks repaired, fires put out, criminals apprehended, sewage treated, water provided. More and more we see major needs for road and bridge repairs, replacement of entire sewage systems, demands for improved tax climates and incentives to attract or hold industry, the cost of reduction in pollution. There will be increasing competition for public funds at both federal and state levels. With fewer students, our pleas lack prima facie validity.

Federal and state governments are facing massive increases in the burden of social security and other pension systems which must be paid out of current (and future) revenue. Illinois faces ballooning pressures in its various retirement systems including those for teachers. As this burden grows, there will be proportionally fewer active workers.

Finally, the public as a whole seems less supportive of education. Trust in the value of education and belief that education is of high quality have diminished. In taking our case to the public and in pointing to our needs, we reinforce certain negative points. The public thinks our schools are not doing their job. The quality of teachers is frequently called into question. While we stress low salaries and consequent attractiveness of other fields, the public notes that we are attracting the less academically talented into education. Remember the old saw, "those who can, do; those who can't, teach."

POLITICS AND EDUCATION

In the last several months, educational issues have been given prominent play by the press. Several national commissions and study groups have called for transformation/reform of education in such documents as A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.[3] President Reagan, who vowed to eliminate the Department of Education is now hectoring the NEA and AFT and the public on the need for educational improvements, merit pay, greater citizen involvement in public (and private) schools. The Democrats have seized upon educational issues in attacks on the President and promise to make education a major issue in the 1984 elections.

Educational issues have been prominent in budget battles both federal and state. In Illinois the needs of education were a major factor in recent tax increases, reluctantly voted by the Legislature but advocated by Governor Thompson.

For the moment, education occupies a prominent position in public policy discussions. But such an emphasis can be transitory: what occupies the popular press and politicians one day may fade rapidly the next. And, as the recent political process in Illinois demonstrates, education can become a pawn in a struggle between and among factions who have little real interest in education.

THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPEECH AND THEATRE

It is impossible to estimate how all these forces will affect education in this state, let alone how they will impact upon our programs. However, three factors lead to the belief there are real opportunities for our program among the challenges that confront us.

First, speaking and listening are being accorded major attention as central to the educational process and as areas in which the skills of all individuals must be fully developed. An important emphasis is being given to the aesthetic dimension, including theatre. National commissions, The College Board recommendations on Academic Preparation for College[4], The Paideia Proposal[5] accord our discipline a central emphasis. Their recommendations provide valuable support for our programs. While the various relevant materials are too extensive to quote in any completeness, some citations may capture the flavor of their recommendations. Individuals seeking justifications for their programs will be well-advised to study the entire documents.

> Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the "information age" we are entering. . . . Individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society. . . .
>
> For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence.[6]

Included in the "Implementing Recommendations" are the following:

> The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to (a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate and use what they read; (b) write well-organized, effective papers; (c) listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently; and (d) know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas and values of today's life and culture.[7]

The high school curriculum should also provide students with programs requiring rigorous effort in subjects that advance students' personal, educational and occupational goals, such as the fine and performing arts and vocational education.[8]

The curriculum in the crucial eight grades leading to the high school years should be specifically designed to provide a sound base for study in those and later years in such areas as English language development and writing, computational and problem-solving skills, science, social studies, foreign language and the arts.[9]

In a review of The Paideia Proposal Don Boileau comments upon and cites passages relative to our discipline:

The first major speech communication instruction theme is part of . . . developing the intellectual skills of learning. "The skills to be acquired are the skills of reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing, measuring, estimating and calculating" (p. 26). These skills are "performance skills," and the teaching "must be akin to the coaching that is done to impart athletic skills" (p. 27).

. . . speaking and listening should receive special attention because they trigger mechanisms for other learning. . . .

The second theme for SCA members occurs in the third goal of learning, "enlarged understanding of ideas and values." This goal employs "the interrogative or discussion method of teaching"--teaching by asking questions and leading discussions. . . . Such teaching, which helps students to think clearly, critically, and reflectively has long been advocated by speech methods teachers."[10]

Perhaps the most stimulating reference to the role of our discipline is provided by The College Board in its statement on Academic Preparation for College, as part of its Educational Equality Project.

The arts and skills of English have been at the core of college preparation for generations, and so they are today in the midst of enormous technological and social change. The skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking will be necessary as college students are called on to read a wide variety of materials; to write essays, reports and term papers; to express themselves aloud; and to listen to and learn from discussion and lectures. English language skills serve as the foundation for all these activities.

. . . Language--written and spoken, heard and read--is central to that education. Competence in language serves a variety of purposes: accomplishing the business of daily life, communicating attitudes and ideas, expanding thought and informing the imagination.[11]

Several learning outcomes identified in the Section on English relate to our field; for example:

Speaking and Listening

The ability to engage in discussion as both speaker and listener--interpreting, analyzing, and summarizing.

The ability to contribute to classroom discussions in a way that is readily understood by listeners--that is, succinct and to the point.

The ability to present an opinion persuasively.

The ability to recognize the intention of a speaker and to be aware of the techniques a speaker is using to affect an audience.

The ability to recognize and take notes on important points in lectures and discussions.

The ability to question inconsistency in logic and to separate fact from opinion.[12]

Although listed under writing, speech teachers have long been concerned with matters such as "collecting information and formulating ideas, determining their relationships, drafting [outlining], arranging . . . in an appropriate order and building transitions and revising . . .;" the ability to write [speak] appropriately for different occasions, audiences and purposes (persuading, explaining, describing, telling a story).[13]

The College Board urges that "Students going to college will profit from the following preparation in the arts," and lists appreciation of the "unique qualities of each of the arts," "cultural differences," "different artistic styles and works from representative historical periods and culture," "knowledge of social and intellectual influences affecting each form," and "ability. . . to express themselves in one or more of the arts." They also stress more intensive preparation in "at least one of the four areas of the arts: visual arts, theatre, music and dance."[14]

For those with preparation in theatre, they list the following as needed knowledge and skills:

> The ability to identify and describe--using the appropriate vocabulary--different kinds of plays from different historical periods.
>
> The ability to analyze the structure, plot, characterization, and language of a play, both as a literary document and as a theater production.
>
> The ability to evaluate a theater production.
>
> To know how to express themselves by acting in a play or by improvising, or by writing a play, or by directing or working behind the scenes of a theater production.[15]

While other recent materials could be cited, the point is clear: concerns central to our field are receiving major attention in the recommendations of various major study groups and commissions.

Second, there is growing general public awareness of the importance of oral communication skills. Surveys of businesses, ministers, adults of various occupations and interests, repeatedly show oral communication skills to be among the urgent needs for work, for improvement of social and personal relationships, for advancement. Stagefright, what we now term communication apprehension, is reported to be the most widespread fear in America. The popularity of toastmaster and toastmistress groups, of the Dale Carnegie programs, of the multiple private entrepreneurs promising to improve speech and communication skills (often at fees of $300 or more an hour), attest to a great recognition of need on the part of the public and a hunger for improved skill and confidence in communication. While many in higher education have tended away from the practical applications of our field in favor of interesting and important theoretical questions, there has never been a greater demand for the skills we profess to be able to teach.

3) Our profession has matured to a point where it is ready to respond to these needs. Seventy years ago we were on the verge of founding the modern field of speech. For years we struggled to develop textbooks, design curricula, introduce speech and theatre departments into our colleges and universities and courses in these areas into our high schools. We now have the largest number of academic teachers and the largest number of students involved in our programs in history. Our theoretical and research interests have developed and broadened and intense specialization has emerged. Subject matter formerly confined to a few courses in one department at a College are now often diversified into three, four or five departments, many offering work through the doctorate.

Our Associations have developed to the point where a variety of resources are available--from research journals to free bibliographies for the classroom teacher, from statements of competencies in communication for students to professional standards for speech educators in various areas. This is not to say that we are at the end of the process--indeed we are closer to the inception of

many of these things than we would like. But we now have the body of knowledge and the resources to respond to these needs with a breadth and competency not available to us twenty-five years ago.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES

Individual people and programs must decide how they will respond to the various challenges posed to education generally and to our programs specifically. However, the economic pressures on education will continue throughout the decade. Success will consist more of survival with the same or a slightly enhanced quality rather than major growth or assurance of future resources. This decade is one of a "rhetoric of quality" for education. We are not going to be expanding in total resources or in people served unless we serve quite different students in quite different ways. So we must build on the base of doing what we do with greater quality. We must be willing to account for our use of scarce resources and to demonstrate the value realized from our use of those resources compared to other uses.

This is a challenge to excellence. In that contest, I offer some probes for consideration.

1. There must be a vision of the future. If our programs are to flourish we must identify their strengths and weaknesses. We must develop goals for our programs, a rationale which supports those goals, and a practical plan for their achievement. We need to gain support for our programs before they are challenged. We must be affirmative in telling people what we can do and how we can do it. This means be aware of resources of our discipline. As Boileau notes:

> The Paideia group of twenty-two of our nation's leading intellectuals places aspects of our discipline in the center of the intellectual skills necessary for learning and the skills necessary for effective teaching. If

one uses the statements of The Paideia Proposal along with the statements of business and educational leaders, a balanced appeal for speech communications can be made to school boards and curriculum leaders.[16]

2. We must work in cooperation with our colleagues, particularly those in English. The term "language arts" is being heard more frequently in the circles in which I move. Perhaps it has always been popular. In all the commission materials and various national surveys there is a linkage of English or language skills and speech or communication. We will not change this pattern overnight and we probably should not devote much effort to change it at the elementary and secondary levels, for state certification agencies, etc. It is proper to demand our place in the sun. But that place involves our role as one part of the "language skills" and "language arts" portion of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. We have expertise that many of those trained in English (particularly those in literature) need. We can build on such works as Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships: Connections and Contrasts[17] and Education in the 80's: Speech Communication.[18] The NCTE can be our ally and a resource in important ways just as the SCA is our ally and resource in important ways.

Speech Communication, Theatre, Mass Communication, Speech and Hearing Science will survive as separate departments at the major colleges and universities. They can rename themselves, pursue specialties in research, and otherwise go about their business. They will no longer provide the organizational models for the elementary and secondary teacher or for community college curricula. Nor will many of them provide adequate breadth to prepare the typical secondary school teacher of speech and theatre. As the need for more and better-prepared teachers in speech and theatre at the secondary level and the community college

level becomes pressing before the end of this decade (and I believe it will) there will be fewer college and university programs prepared to articulate directly with their needs, and s one commission noted:

> The issue of recruiting and retaining the best possible teachers involves many factors other than their training during college years, but it is this training for which colleges and universities are responsible. The Commission feels strongly that both the attractiveness of the profession of teaching and teacher preparation itself must be improved.[19]

Various professional associations within the discipline need to improve cooperation and communication. The Illinois Speech and Theatre Association profits from drawing upon resources provided by the Speech Communication Association even though most ISTA members are not members of SCA. Similarly, many studies of the Association for Communication Administration are of value to a wide range of administrators and professionals in theatre, communication, mass communication and speech. National studies yielding competency or certification standards are of value to the individual states and programs--even if few of the individual states contribute support to or too few elementary and secondary teachers are members of the sponsoring agencies. Keeping in touch becomes more and more difficult as we expand, diversify and specialize.

3. Quality will tell. We are well-advised to do less and to do that at a very high level of quality. We must be able to demonstrate the quality of our programs--not in a defensive stance but in an awareness of the right of students and the public including to hold us acountable for use of scarce resources.

4. We must cope with the tension which is evident between the desire for high standards and the desire to provide every person with a quality education. Speech and theatre programs seem ideally situated to provide varied, flexible programs which can move each person toward a level of expertise approaching the

limits of that individual's pootential. This theme was enunciated in A Nation at Risk:

> We define "excellence" to mean several related things. At the level of the individual learner, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners. . . .
>
> We do not believe that a public commitment to excellence and educational reform must be made at the expense of a strong public commitment to the equitable treatment of our diverse population. The twin goals of equity and high quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice. To do so would deny young people their chance to learn and live according to their aspirations and abilities. It would also lead to a generalized accommodation to mediocrity in our society on the one hand or the creation of an undemocratic elitism on the other.
>
> Our goal must be to develop the talents of all to their fullest.[20]

ENDNOTES

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[1]"The Annual Report on the Economic status of the Profession 1982-83," Academe: Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors, July-August 1983, p. 1.

[2]James F. Whitman, The State Investment in Higher Education, 1983 (Lansing: President's Council of State Colleges and Universities, 1983) cited in The Green Sheet: Circular Letter No. 8 (Published by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges), June 29, 1983, pp. 14-15.

[3]The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (Washington: United States Department of Education, 1983).

[4]Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do (New York: The College Board, 1983).

[5]Mortimer J. Adler, The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1982).

[6]The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, p. 7.

[7]Ibid, p. 25.

[8]Ibid, p. 26.

[9]Ibid, p. 26-7.

[10]Don M. Boileau, "Review: The Paideia Proposal," Communication Education,

32 (1983), 356.

[11]The College Board, Academic Preparation for College, p. 15.

[12]Ibid, p. 15.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Ibid, p. 17.

[15]Ibid, p. 18.

[16]Don M. Boileau, "Review: The Paideia Proposal, p. 357.

[17]Barry M. Kroll and Roberta J. Vann, eds. Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships: Connections and Contrasts (Urbana: National council of Teachers of English, 1982.

[18]Gustav W. Friedrich, ed. Education in the 80's: Speech Communication, National Education Association, 1981.

[19]National Commission on Higher Education Issues, To Strengthen Quality in Higher Education: Summary Recommendations (Washington, American Council on Education, 1982), p. 8.

[20]The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, pp. 12-13.